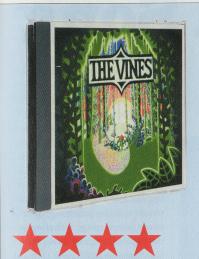
IN BLOOM: The Vines bring great songs and perfect hair back to rock.

By JEFF APTER



The Vines

Highly Evolved

HEAVENLY/EMI

IKE FIRST LOVES, FIRST ALBUMS are supposed to be messy and thrilling and dumb and, ideally, unforgettable. Highly Evolved, the debut LP from Sydney rockers the Vines - whose rapid, unstoppable rise from a suburban garage to "Beatles meets Nirvana" raps is straight out of rock mythology meets all the criteria for great debuts. Like Nirvana's Bleach or the Manic Street Preachers' Generation Terrorists, even Silverchair's Frogstomp, this is an album that grabs a moment in time. In the Vines' case, they're riding high on the back-to-rockin'-basics zeitgeist that has made the Strokes, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, the Hives and the White Stripes new millennium leaders.

Oh yeah, the songs. Highly Evolved is a fast, sharp, smart, sometimes schizoid effort, a record whose mood swings veer between the furious to the woozily psychedelic. The opener, UK Top 40 hit "Highly Evolved", is a 90-second statement of intent; it's pure punk-pop fury, frontman and tunesmith Craig Nicholls shaking his floppy fringe and screaming his lungs Barnesy-raw. But within two minutes, the album is riding high on the friendly sky, as "Autumn Shade" drifts off into the stratosphere, smiling beatifically. The rest of Highly Evolved staggers between the two extremes: "Outta the Way" and current single, "Get Free", are frenetic ravers, with Nicholls giving his larynx a fearful battering. "In the Jungle" has an each-way bet, with its stop-start breakdown, while "Factory" slips into a cool faux-reggae stomp. Meanwhile, in the land of chill, "Homesick" hovers

